

# Kursenieki language

**Kursenieki language** (Kursenieki: *Kursisk valuod*; Latvian: *Kursenieku valoda*) or **Curonian language of Curonian isthmus**<sup>[2]</sup> (German: *Nehrungskurisch* – 'Spit Curonian') is a dialect of the Latvian language spoken by the Kursenieki of the Curonian Spit, a thin strip of land stretching between southwestern Lithuania and Russia. In the process of various migrations of the 14th–17th centuries, Curonians (already speaking a Latvian dialect) settled along the Curonian Spit in East Prussia and became known as Kursenieki.

Kursenieki language was influenced by Old Prussian, Low German, High German and the Samogitian dialect successively, and by the end of the 18th century new Curonian dialects had formed, with the dialect of the Curonian Spit being notably distinct, due to its isolation from the mainland. Kursenieki vocabulary published in 1927 shows: 60% of Curonian words were the same as Latvian, 26% were loanwords from “German” (i.e. Low German and High German), and 13% from Lithuanian dialects. The Kursenieki language is mutually intelligible with Latvian, especially its southwestern dialects.<sup>[3]</sup>

## History



In 1649 settlement of the Kursenieki language speaking Kursenieki spanned from Memel (Klaipėda) to Danzig (Gdańsk) in Poland.

Before World War II, the Kursenieki language was a sociolect of Curonian fishermen of the Curonian Spit. In other spheres of everyday life, Kursenieki used the Low German and High German languages. The events of the first half of the 20th century, including the Soviet and German occupations of the Baltic states and later East Prussia, led to the near extinction of the language, making it severely endangered. Several remaining native speakers live in Germany, having been expelled as "Germans" in the ethnic cleansing that took place in East Prussia after World War II.

Several pages of sample texts in Kursenieki language are included in the 1888 monograph *Über die Sprache der preussischen Letten* by Adalbert Bezzenberger and the 1927 monograph *Kursenieku valoda* by Juris Plāķis, where they describe the language spoken by the inhabitants of the Curonian Spit.<sup>[4]</sup>

There is a 2002 documentary film *Tarp astuonių vėjų* ("Amidst Eight Winds") by Arvydas Barysas about the endangered Kursenieki language. The film, introducing the Curonian Spit, speaks about three brothers Sakutis (plural: Sakučiai) who had moved from the Spit to Sweden about 60 years ago, but still speak "*kuršiškai*".<sup>[5][6]</sup> In 2005 the film won the Best Overall Production Award at the second European Heritage Film Festival in Toblach (Italy) under the patronage of Europa Nostra.<sup>[7]</sup>

Kursenieki language	
Kursisk valuod	
Region	Curonian Spit (historically), Germany (nowadays)
Native speakers	2 full, 3 partial, a few passive speakers <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	<div>Indo-European<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Balto-Slavic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Baltic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Eastern Baltic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Latvian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Kursenieki language</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	–
Glottolog	None

## See also

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- Curonian language

## References

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5. "ACTIVITY REPORT 2004, LITHUANIAN NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO " ([https://unesco.lt/uploads/file/file\\_EN/Reports/report2004.pdf](https://unesco.lt/uploads/file/file_EN/Reports/report2004.pdf))
6. "Tarp 8 vėjų" (<https://arvydasbarysasdotorg.wordpress.com/2014/09/28/tarp-8-veju/>) the DVD annotation at an author's webpage (retrieved June 23, 2019)
7. EUROPA NOSTRA Pan-European Federation for Heritage - NEWSLETTER Spring 2005 (<http://www.patrimoniosos.it/rsol.php?op=getarticle&id=10942>)

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